Saint Francis: Visionary of Life

"Hold fast to the memory of our father and brother, Francis, for the praise and glory of Him who made him great among us and glorified him in the sight of the angels."[1]

Saint Francis, the poor man of Assisi, is a powerful model for us in building a world and culture that is authentically pro-life. This 13th century saint was a visionary of the radiant goodness of human life.

Early in Saint Francis' conversion, he was riding through the countryside and came across a person suffering from leprosy. Despite being repelled by the appearance and smell, he came down from his horse and kissed the hand of the leper, who returned his kiss of peace, filling Francis with joy. He could see the invaluable dignity of every person, even amidst utter poverty, the disfigurement of disease, and the stain of sin.

Saint Francis is well-known for his radical imitation of Christ and his love for all creation. This is evident in his prayer, "The Canticle of the Creatures," which praises God for all He has created: the sun, moon, and stars; wind, water, and fire. Francis proclaims that the created world reveals the glory of God himself. This is particularly true for the human person, created in the image of God, whose life from conception to natural death is to be honored and protected. Among all creation, the human person has the unique capacity to praise God, highlighting the distinctive dignity of human life.

Strikingly, Francis uttered his "Canticle" while lying half-blind on his deathbed. In welcoming "Sister Death," Francis could no longer physically see the beauty of creation, yet still he praised God for the created world around him.

Oftentimes we, too, are blinded to the goodness of life. Our vision may be blurred by hardships such as poverty, fragility, or suffering, all of which Saint Francis experienced in his earthly life. In the

face of such challenges, Saint Francis is a powerful intercessor, opening our heart and eyes to the gift of life even in the most trying circumstances. Francis had a particular devotion to the Lord's own vulnerability—in the manger, in the Eucharist, and on the Cross—highlighting God's presence in the most defenseless among us.

Pope Leo XIV has decreed that for 2026 "a special Year of Saint Francis shall be proclaimed, in which every faithful Christian, following the example of the Saint of Assisi, shall become a model of holiness of life and a constant witness of peace."[2] The taking of innocent human life through abortion, assisted suicide, and other acts of violence destroys peace in our world.[3] We are called to be witnesses of peace by boldly proclaiming the dignity of the human person and working for the protection of all human life.

In this Year of Saint Francis, may he help us to see the beauty of life in all of creation, in particular, in the weakest and most vulnerable among us. Together, let us pray for the protection of human life and the courage to defend it.

"Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out Your holy and true command."[4]

- Saint Francis' "Prayer before the Crucifix"

[1] Angelo Cardinal De Donatis, "Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the occasion of the Eighth Centenary of the death of Saint Francis of Assisi, by which a special Jubilee Year is proclaimed, with associated Plenary Indulgences, 16.01.2026," (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2026).
[2] *Ibid*.
[3] Pope Leo XIV, "Address to Participants in the 'One Humanity, One Planet' Conference," January 31, 2026 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2026).
[4] Armstrong, Regis J., O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv., and William J. Short, O.F.M., eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents – The Saint* (New York, NY: New City Press, 2001), 40.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Copyright © 2026, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.